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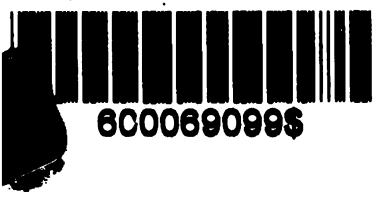

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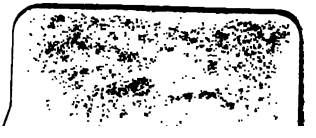

THE

DEMON OF SICILY

A ROMANCE,

IN FOUR VOLUMES,

BY

EDWARD MONTAGUE ESQ.

Author of Legends of a Nunnery, the Castle of Berr Pomeroy, &c. &c. &c.

Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd?
Bring'st with thee airs from Heaven, or blasts from Hell
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee.

SHAKESPEARE.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

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1807.

THE

DEMON OF SICILY.

CHAP. VI.

DISTRACTION seized the mind of Ricardo when he heard that his beloved Louisa had been carried off. For some moments in speechless agony he gazed on the equally distressed Signora Bononi, then having informed

himself of the time she was taken, he rushed swiftly out of the cottage, and vowing he would seek her in every part of the island, proceeded as swiftly as his limbs trembling with horror, consternation, and despair, could carry him.

Arrived at his castle, he ordered the fleetest horses to be saddled, and, attended by some of his domestics, set out on his journey. From the peasants who resided near the residence of the Signora Bononi he learnt that a lady was observed to ride by very early in the morning, and that there were some horsemen with her.

As there was no doubt but that the person described by the peasants must be Louisa, Ricardo pursued his course along the road they informed him she had gone; and, animated with the hope of soon reaching her, and revenging himself on the ruffians who had bore her away, he soon crossed the hills that closed in the valley, and darted into the black bosom of a forest through which lay the road they had taken.

The forest extended some leagues, and sheltered them by its umbrageous recesses from the burning heat of the mid-day sun. Toward the evening, Ricardo was obliged to stop, to rest

the wearied steeds, and to allow his people to refresh themselves; for himself, his mind was too miserable to permit him to think of food, and each moment was an age that delayed his pursuit of Louisa.

His people were soon mounted on their horses, and leaving the forest, they now began to wind over a mountainous tract of country.

Ricardo reached the summit of the last of the chain of hills just as the clouds, tinged with the radiant beams of the setting sun, were losing their borrowed lustre. Before him lay for many leagues a flat country, and as swiftly

swiftly his eyes surveyed the windings of the road, he caught a glimpse of some horsemen, who were soon hid from his sight by the grey livery of evening. One of his servants at the same instant declared that he had observed something white before one of the men, and Ricardo cheered himself with the hopes of soon overtaking Louisa.

His horses, however, being jaded with the fatigues of the day, proceeded but slowly, and the night closed on them soon after they had left the lofty hills, and were proceeding on the plains below.

The east wind now began to rush mournfully along the face of the country, while its attendant vapours became every moment more dense. Ricardo oft cast a supplicating look toward the heavens, in hopes of seeing the moon brightly rising in the vaulted arch, but he looked in vain, for the clouds darkly clustered around, and the distant thunder rolled mournfully above.

Thus situated, and unable at times to discern the road, the party wandered far out of its beaten tract ere they had observed their error, to rectify which became impossible, and every moment increased their difficulties

ficulties and the agitation of Ricardo. All hope of continuing his journey that night was at an end, and he had only to pray that the same weather which detained him would do the like to the party who were carrying off his adored Louisa.

The domestics now alighted from their wearied horses and waited for the coming dawn, when a horn was distinctly heard to wind amongst the far distant hills, and a response was shortly after made to it in still fainter sounds.

Ricardo sprung on his horse, and bidding his domestics do the same,

without being able to see whither they were going, save when the flashes of lightning darting through the vapours partially illumined the scene around them, and was their only guide over an unknown tract of country.

Ricardo often listened in hope of hearing the horn again, but all was silent; he however still continued in the direction of the sound till the horses were hardly able to proceed; for in addition to their fatigue, the ground they were now passing over was an uncultivated heath, and the briars and long trailing brambles entangled their feet. Ricardo was at length on the point of reining in his

his steed, when the waving of a torch and the sound of a horn, which appeared not far off, made him determine to proceed; fearful, however, of meeting with banditti, which in those wild secluded and desert regions was not improbable, he ordered his people to preserve the strictest silence.

A light gleaming from a casement, which from its height apparently belonged to a large edifice, directed Ricardo to the portals of what appeared to be an ancient castle. He took hold of the horn which hung by their side, but ere he applied it to his mouth, he deliberated on the step he

was going to take, for he considered that the inmates of that building might be banditti.

At this idea the horn was dropping from his hand, when he suddenly reflected that his adored Louisa might be in their hands. Without hesitation, and confiding in the number of his attendants, he blew the horn. A hoarse voice from above demanded "if that was Gomelli?"

"No," replied Ricardo looking up to a small turret window which rose on one side of the gates, and from whence the voice proceeded; "Having had the misfortune to be benighted

ed with my attendants, I have to request you will grant me and them a shelter for a few hours."

"I don't think we can," replied the voice; "however wait there, and I will ask our Capitano, I mean the Signor of the Castello."

Some voices in conversation were then heard, and presently another man demanded how many there were, as he was afraid there would not be room for them.

Ricardo having satisfied him on that head he departed from the casement, and after waiting some time, they heard

the paces of people on the other side of the gates, which were soon after thrown open.

The aspects of the men who appeared in the court of the edifice, and who held torches in their hands to dispel the gloomy shades of night, were such as by no means were calculated to give a favourable opinion either of them or their profession. They were of gigantic stature, each wearing on his head a casque of iron on which was fixed a large lock of horse-hair. Their countenances were dark and ferocious; and they were all armed with long swords.

As

As soon as Ricardo and his people had entered the court yard, the men closed the gates, and conducted them to a large hall, where the remains of a fire yet blazed. One of them threw several faggots upon it, and in a few minutes the walls were illumined by the cheerful light.

The men then departed promising to acquaint the Signor of the Castello, with his arrival; and Ricardo, who had now every reason to believe that he had unfortunately got amongst a horde of banditti, acquainted his people with his suspicions, and desired them to be on their guard, and by no means to separate.

The

The sounds of many voices, which appeared to come from a passage, the door of which was open, made Ricardo advance toward it, to endeavour to learn what was going forwards. Hardly had he gained the entrance of the passage when the sounds ceased, and a manly voice sung a beautiful Sicilian ariette.

"Bravo, Capitano," said a number of voices when it was concluded, and the conversation was now resumed. The voice he had heard greatly interested Ricardo; it was familiar to his ear, and he had some hopes that he had little to fear for his personal safety.

Approaching footsteps made him re-

tire

tire from the entrance of the passage, and shortly after a man approached and informed him that the Signor of the Castello was coming.

When he entered the hall what was the astonishment of Ricardo to behold in him the unfortunate Count de Leoni.

He started at seeing Ricardo; his countenance betrayed tokens of pleasure, but that satisfaction appeared clouded with an uneasiness too apparent to escape Ricardo's notice.

"Good heavens!" said he at length, "what

"what fortunate event brought you here?"

"No fortunate event," replied Ricardo; "you see me, Count, the most miserable of men. A lady whom I tenderly loved, has been forced from her abode by some villains, and in seeking her I was benighted with my attendants and"—

"I know the whole, Signor," said the Count impatiently, "follow me."

Greatly astonished, Ricardo accompanied the Count, preceded by an attendant with a torch.

"Lead

"Lead to the suit of chambers next the North Hall."

The man bowed, and in silence they crossed through several passages, till at length the man stopped at a door, which the Count de Leoni throwing open, Ricardo once more beheld his adored Louisa.

Great was the delight which they shewed at this so unlooked-for meeting; and after some time passed in mutual expressions of their happiness, looked on the Count for an explanation of his meeting there with Louisa.

The Count, who was pacing the chamber

chamber with folded arms and a melancholy deep fixed in his countenance, understood what he meant.

"You cannot be astonished at my situation here, Signor Ricardo, if you will recal to your mind the cruel and base artifices made use of by your father to deprive me of my property."

"Too well I know it," said Ricardo, "but that act, Count, was the cause of his death, and also of one of his associates, Roderigo de Romanzo."

"Just Heaven!" exclaimed the Count, "are they both dead?"

"Yes," replied Ricardo, "the night after

after you left the Castle saw my father slain by Romanzo, who himself fell by my arm."—

"And the Count Altona! this night fell by mine," said Leoni.

"The Count Altona!" exclaimed Ricardo.

"It was he who carried off that Signora from her home."

Ricardo's eyes gleamed darkly and dissatisfied when he heard that the persecutor of his Louisa had fallen by other hands than his.

"I was returning to this place," continued

tinued the Count, " with some of my people, when I heard the voice of a female seemingly in great distress. I hastened instantly to the spot, and beheld the Signora in the arms of Altona, who was placing her before him on his steed. My people immediately by a signal surrounded his party, while, instigated by a just resentment for his base conduct toward me, and also to rescue the lady, I challenged him to the combat. We fought, and Altona fell. In answer to my questions the Signora disclosed to me who she was, and her knowledge of you. The blushes which appeared in her cheeks as she mentioned your name

avowed

avowed her sentiments for you, and to-morrow I should have had the pleasure of conducting her home. Your fortunate arrival here has taken that duty from me, and I rejoice in having been the instrument of protecting your Louisa."

Ricardo flew into his arms, and embraced him with the deepest sensations of gratitude.

"One favour, Count, I have to request," said he, "that you will accompany me back. I entreat you not to refuse me; I have circumstances of great importance to your comfort to disclose to you."

The

The Count de Leoni assented to the wishes of Ricardo, who shortly now returned to Louisa and during their conversation was informed by her of the circumstances that preceded the daring outrage of the Count Altona.

It has been stated that the Count, the day after the death of the Marchese de Carlentini, left the Castello with his attendants; he had, however, on the day he unfortunately had met Ricardo at the residence of Louisa, beheld that lovely female, and then resolved on forcing her away to his own residence.

He went not far from her abode and concealed himself in a peasant's cottage for a few days with two of

of his men; he then left it, and lurked about the abode of Louisa in order to find an opportunity of effecting his designs.

That evening she was taking a solitary walk on the banks of the stream that meandered through the valley, when she perceived three men swiftly following her. Terrified at this, and alarmed at the lateness of the hour, (for ruminating on Ricardo the minutes had passed insensibly by,) she exerted all her speed in order to avoid the men who were evidently pursuing her; but her attempts were of little avail. Breathless with terror she had sunk insensibly on the ground, and the steps

of

of the ruffians sounded close to her ear, when a party of peasants who had been cutting timber in the forest happily came up, at the sight of whom the men who had given her so much alarm slunk away, and under covert of the grey mantle of evening escaped.

It was under the influence of the terrors excited by this circumstance that she betrayed such evident tokens of the melancholy that pervaded her breast in the letter she wrote to Ricardo, which, however, she forbore mentioning to him, as she felt unwilling to increase the distress he then endured for the loss of his father.

Some

Some evenings after, just as she was retiring to her couch, the door of the cottage was suddenly burst open, and a party of men entered, who seized her, and having placed a handkerchief to her mouth to prevent her cries being heard, and taken the same precaution with her mother and the domestic, whom they also cruelly bound with cords, they placed her on a horse, which the Count mounted, and then swiftly proceeded to their place of destination; but the watchful eye of Providence was on the actions of Altona, and he paid for his violent outrage and base intentions against the peace and honor of Louisa with his life.

Such was the detail which Louisa

gave to Ricardo of her adventures; and when she had concluded he again embraced her, and again gratefully expressed his sense of the obligations he was under to the Count de Leoni; obligations which he felt happy he should be able to make some small return for.

The grey dawn now began to glimmer through the casement of the apartment they were in, and soon Aurora tinged the eastern clouds with a roseate hue. The Count judging of the impatience of Louisa to quiet the distractions of her unhappy mother by her presence, ordered fresh horses for Ricardo and his attendants, and when the

the beams of the morning smiled on the turrets of the castle and the waving summits of an adjacent forest, the party, late so melancholy, but now anticipating future years of joy and happiness, set out on their journey, accompanied by the Count, who, however, had not recovered the tranquillity of his mind, and whose frequent sighs bespoke the agitation of his breast.

Well acquainted with that part of the country, the Count led the party a much shorter road than that Ricardo had traversed, and about noon they stopped to rest themselves and the steeds in the refreshing shades of the extensive forest.

Here he took an opportunity of acquainting Ricardo with the events that had taken place since he left the Castle on that fatal evening which placed all his property in the possession of the late Marchese, his associates the Count Altona, and the savage Roderigo di Romanzo.

"To describe to you the distraction of my mind when I found myself stripped of all my prospects is impossible. A thousand times I formed resolutions of terminating my existence, but, the Saints be praised, they failed; I however determined on leaving the Castle, for I well knew that, having exhausted every

every resource, I should be regarded with contempt by my undoers.

"I travelled on, careless whither I went, and only anxious to extend the distance between me and your Castle. About the dawn of the next morning I found myself in this wood. Its gloomy shades were congenial to my feelings, and I remained here the greater part of the day. At length the calls of hunger forced me to seek a cottage, in order to procure some food, and after a long and tedious search, I discoved a wood-cutter's cabin, where I procured some fruit and bread.

"I staid there that night, and early

the next morning I pursued my way along the road we have just passed, driven almost to madness to think of my blindness and folly in allowing myself to be made a dupe of, and in consequence turned out on the world to endure the extremes of wretchedness and poverty.

" In this temper of mind I was attacked by a banditti, and almost glad of an opportunity of reeking my passions on some one, and careless about my own safety, I fought with their leader, whom I killed, and severely wounded two others. Numbers then overpowered me, I was disarmed, and keeping

keeping gloomy silence, I entered the building where you found me.

"The actions I performed, which, though seemingly the result of bravery, were only the rash attempts of a man weary of life, and incensed against his fellow creatures, were regarded with astonishment by the banditti. They saw I did not fear to die, and that carelessness of my personal safety preserved my life. Their troop was now without a leader, and, strange to tell, they pitched on me to supply his place.

"The offer was made me. What was I to do? I had no home to go to, beggary must have been my lot. To be

brief, I accepted the situation. Thus, through a cursed desire for gambling, the Count de Leoni became the chief of a band of robbers."

Here the Count paused. The thoughts of what he once, and what he *now* was, crowded to his memory, and grief sat heavy on his heart. Ricardo, respecting his feelings, and acutely suffering for the cruel and base conduct of his parent, was silent. At length the Count broke a silence so painful to Ricardo, and thus concluded his relation:—

"I had not been long with these men before I perceived that many of them

them under their ruffian forms had hearts which with a little culture might become the residence of humanity. Now I had it in my power to revenge myself on my fellow creatures my nature began to relent, and I employed my time in tutoring my savage troops, and in weaning them from their dreadful propensity to shed guiltless blood. With many I have succeeded; but there are still some wretches among them whose savage bosoms the gentle dew of mercy will never penetrate."

Thus did the unfortunate Count de Leoni conclude his tale; and now Louisa, who almost fainting with the fatigues she had undergone had laid

her head on the soft turf, and for a short time gladly courted the refreshing influence of sleep, awoke from her slumbers, which with the returning composure of her mind had greatly contributed to refresh her, and the domestics bringing up their horses, they hastened to leave the forest ere the gloom of evening should render their journey difficult.

The dark mantle of night was swiftly descending on the earth when Ricardo and his party entered the valley. The hapless Signora Bononi was standing at the gate of her little garden, anxiously awaiting the return of Ricardo, when her bosom was gladdened by the tender

tender and long-continued embrace of her daughter, who was so happily restored to her arms.

Ricardo participated in the happiness which dwelt at the cottage; mindful, however, of the duty he was so anxious to perform respecting the possessions of the Count de Leoni, he reluctantly tore himself away from what he so dearly prized, the company of his Louisa; and leaving two trusty domestics there, lest any attempts should be made by other persons, he departed, after having promised to be there early in the morning.

The

The hope of future days of unalloyed delight now fondly fluttered around Ricardo, who mounting his horse, accompanied by the unhappy Count, still ruminating on the melancholy situation to which he was reduced, soon beheld the dark battlements of the Castle of Carlentini, and alighted at the gates of the court-yard that led to the Northern Hall.

Ricardo looking toward the long casement of the chapel, saw that it was illuminated, and on inquiring the reason, learnt that Father Grimaldi was then about to be committed to the silent bosom of the grave.

The

The solemn strains of the monks were now heard. Ricardo and the Count entered the chapel; the same hangings were up as had covered the walls at the interment of his father, and notwithstanding the happy events of the day, a tear stole from either eye, and a deep sigh issued from his breast when, by means of the solemn scene he now witnessed, the memory of his parent became fresh in his recollection.

When the service was concluded the Abbot advanced to Ricardo, who, delighted to see a man for whom he felt the greatest esteem, willingly protracted the conversation, till the train of monks being ready, he was obliged to depart.

The

The abbot informed him that he was going to leave the monastery he now presided over for another, the name and situation of which he minutely described to Ricardo, and concluded with expressing an earnest wish to see him there should either pleasure or business bring him near the place.

Ricardo now requested the Count de Leoni would follow him to the interior of the Castle; he conducted him to the chamber of the late Marchese; when taking out the packet from the cabinet he thus addressed him:—

"Count Leoni, I am happy that I can make you amends for the injustice,

(not

(not to call it by a harsher title) of my father. This packet contains the whole, as far as I know, of the titles of your estates, and I hope you will consider it as a trifling mark of gratitude for your preservation of my Louisa."

So unlooked-for a circumstance almost deprived the Count of the power to express his thanks to Ricardo; he embraced him, and, when he could speak, overwhelmed him with protestations of his gratitude. Ricardo, who knew that he had done no more than his duty, hastened to prevent the ebullitions of the Count's grateful heart by quitting with him the chamber, and

descending to the hall, where the evening repast awaited them.

Being both greatly fatigued, they soon after retired, and Ricardo, amid the pleasing reflection of having his Louisa restored to him, and the happiness of the Count de Leoni, fell asleep, while visions of bliss hasted to appear before his wakeful imagination.

In the morning the Count de Leoni took his leave, after promising to be at the Castle again in the course of a few days; and Ricardo hasted to his beloved Louisa.

Never in his eyes did she appear so beautiful

beautiful as this morning; the healing powers of sleep had freed her from her late alarms.

The happy Ricardo now made the lovely Louisa an offer of his hand; and anxious to be possessed of such an inestimable treasure as she appeared in his eyes, he entreated her to name the day, when at the altar he should be united to her.

Louisa's blushes told the emotions of her bosom, and at length Ricardo drew from her a consent that that day week should unite their destinies.

Seldom absent from Louisa, unless

at

at the hour of repose, and when he was employed in the necessary preparations for the approaching nuptials, the hours sweetly glided by, and at length brought on that which was to be so productive of bliss to Ricardo.

On that morning all was joy and gaiety at the Castle, the mourning habits for the late Marchese were thrown aside, and Ricardo at the head of his numerous domestics left his residence to proceed to that of Louisa, to conduct her and the Signora Bononi to their future abode.

The tenantry and peasants, dressed in their best apparel, crowded on the lawn

lawn in front of the Northern Towers to welcome their approach, and as Ricardo, leading Louisa, passed through their opened ranks, prayers for their happiness proceeded from every mouth.

At the portals of the North Hall they were met by the abbot of the neighbouring monastery, who not having yet departed to his new situation, had, at the request of Ricardo, attended to perform the nuptial ceremony.

Ricardo was agreeably surprised on entering the hall to see the Count de Leoni, who had arrived there during his absence, anxious to be present at the ceremony which was to produce

produce happiness to his generous friend. He was attended by a numerous train of his vassals, all superbly arrayed, and increased the grandeur and festivity of the scene. The centre of the hall was covered with rich tapestry, as were also the corridore which led to the chapel, and on each side of the hall; behind the triple row of columns which supported the lofty roof, were bands of musicians, who filled the air with their pleasing melodies

Preceded by the abbot, Ricardo and Louisa, followed by the Signora Bononi, the Count de Leoni, and the principal attendants, entered the chapel, and

at

at the altar were united in the indissoluble bonds of matrimony—their hearts were united before.

A splendid banquet awaited them in the hall, and numerous tables were laid out on the lawn fronting the Castello, where the peasantry were regaled, whose loud acclamations when they heard that their lord was united to his Louisa were borne on the wings of the breeze to the neighbouring hills, where echo reveberated the sounds which long dwelt amongst their verdant recesses.

When the banquet was over, the abbot was going to take his leave; but Ricardo rising up requested to have a few

few moments discourse with him, to which the venerable father consenting, they retired to an apartment, from whence after they had remained there some time, the abbot retired to his monastery, and Ricardo resumed his seat by the side of the lovely Marchesa de Carlentini; he, however, was silent on the subject of his conversation with the abbot.

In the evening the hall was brilliantly illuminated; the dulcet sounds of the musicians floated in the air; the peasants on the lawn, whose canopy was the beautiful Sicilian sky, whose light the silver beams of the moon, aided by myriads of bright stars, danced away the

the sportive hours to the gay and airy Sicilian measures which resounded on all sides.

Thus concluded the happy day of the nuptials of Ricardo Marchese de Carlentini, who now had the felicity to behold irrevocably his own the sweet beauty whose form had captivated and whose mental accomplishments had so entirely enveloped him in the soft bondage of love, rendered the height of human bliss by its being mutual.

The Count de Leoni, when he left Ricardo, proceeded immediately to his estates, where he was joyfully received by his vassals and domestics, who had

fruit-

fruitlessly endeavoured to trace his steps when in all the agony of despair he had left the Castello di Carlentini; having then arranged whatever was requisite he repaired to the solitary residence of the banditti at the foot of the lofty mountains, which form the Vale di Demone; they were delighted to see him return, but their joy was turned to grief when they understood he was going to leave them. He selected amongst them such as he knew would form good members of society, and then proposed to allow them a certain tract of land on his estate, which they might cultivate and leave off their present desperate trade, which

sooner

sooner or later would bring them under the iron grasp of Justice.

Joyfully his offer was accepted, and leaving to those who still determined to carry on this trade of blood and rapine all their ill-got treasures, they bent their steps to the Count's estate, little regretted by the rest, who, in consequence of their departure, found themselves in possession of an immense booty.

The Count then returned to his estate, where, as he was allotting his new vassals their promised lands, one of them who had been in conversation with the Count's domestics came up,

much agitated, and requested to speak in private to him.

The Count consented to grant the man's request, who begged he would inform him if it was true that the Marchese de Carlentini was dead, as in that case he had something of consequence to impart.

Somewhat surprized, the Count satisfied him on that head, and the man continued:—

"About fifteen years ago, my Lord, I resided at Palermo, and was connected with a set of bravos. My circumstances were such as drove me to the

the dreadful trade of blood. I had nothing to depend on for subsistence but my stiletto. One evening as I was walking along the Strado Nuovo, at the back of the church of San Nicolo, I was accosted by a cavalier, whom I afterwards found to be the Marchese de Carlentini.

"It seems that I had been pointed out to him as one who would perform the business he wished to have done, as he entered on that subject immediately, which was an offer of forty ducats if I would assassinate a Signor.

"I accepted his offer without hesitation, and followed him to the end

of the strada; where, after waiting sometime opposite to a house, he pointed out to me a man who was approaching it, and having informed me that he was the person against whom my stiletto was to be used, told me where he resided, and left me.

"It was then almost dark. I drew my cloak over my face, and advancing toward the person, prepared to execute what I had undertaken to perform, but was prevented by the approach of some people; and while they were passing my victim entered the house.

"I staid

"I staid some time in the passage without hearing any one move about the house, and concluding from that circumstance that there were no domesties in it, I determined to enter it at midnight; and marking the place, went away. In order to be certain if my suspicions were right, I stopped at a little shop where ices were vended, and there learnt that the house was inhabited only by a cavalier and one female domestic.

"At midnight I entered it, having a lamp concealed beneath my cloak. After some trouble I discovered the chamber where the Signor slept, and moving the curtains of the bed aside,

I let a ray of light fall on the countenance of the sleeper, but started on beholding the features of Signor Valvano, who had saved my life; for, but a few evenings before, being ignorant of my horrid profession, he had assisted me against the attacks of two cavaliers, one of whom I had attempted to kill.

"I found it totally impossible," continued the man, "to raise my dagger against the Signor; a thought, however, instantly arose in my mind, that I might obtain the forty ducats and preserve the life of Valvano. There were some difficulties in my project, but I was in need of the money,

and

and I could not spill the blood of one who had saved my life.

"Without hesitation I awoke the Signor Valvano, and bid him arise and dress himself. Unarmed as he was, resistance was useless, and the glittering steel of my dagger told him the fate that awaited his non-compliance with my orders.

"At that hour I had little fear of meeting with any one to interrupt my purposes; and after I had passed through a few stradas, I left the city, and wound along the sea shore.

"Signor Valvano's terrors increased

at seeing himself in the power of a man on the beach at the solitary hour of midnight, and in accents of the highest distress frequently entreated me not to murder him.

"Had your life been my object, Signor, (said I,) I could have accomplished my purpose when you were asleep.

"This seemed to comfort him, and at length, after walking a considerable time, I came to the residence of my associates, which was in a lone house on the beach, more than a league from Palermo. It was here I determined to keep the Signor Valvano; for though the remembrance of the service

service he had rendered me made me resolve not to deprive him of life, yet I had no scruples in confining him, even though that confinement were to last as long as I lived.

"In the lower parts of the house were many secure places well adapted to my purpose, and in one of them I left the unfortunate Valvano.

"The next morning I waited on the Marchese de Carlentini. 'Well, Ugo,' said he, 'have you been successful?' Yes my lord, I replied, his body is now food for fishes.

"He seemed not to approve of what

 I pretend-

I pretended I had done with the remains of Valvano; I however invented as the reason a tale of his having fled from me toward the sea shore, into which, after having stabbed, I had cast him. He then gave me the forty ducats, and I retired well pleased with the success that had attended my proceedings.

" The unfortunate Signor Valvano remained for some time in confinement; during which period I continued to obtain further sums of money from the Marchese de Carlentini, threatening him, in case of refusal, to publish to the world his having employed me to murder the Signor.

" Thus

"Thus passed away near five years, when our retreat being discovered, and learning that the officers of Justice were proceeding to apprehend us, we escaped in a vessel which was always in readiness for such an emergency.

"The Signor Valvano was taken with us, and as we were connected with the banditti at the foot of the solitary castello near the Val di Demone, we hasted thither, and from that period made it our residence.

"The Signor Valvano was forced by me to take an oath never to attempt to leave the Castello, on which

 condition

condition he was not again confined in a dungeon, while I still at different times found an opportunity of importuning the Marchese for money, which he, through fear, never refused me. As he is now dead, the Signor Valvano is freed from his oath, and I trust, my Lord, that you will take the proper means to restore him to the world."

The man, who was called Ugo, thus concluded his long story; and the Count de Leoni immediately sent to the Castello to request the release of Signor Valvano.

The Count related these circumstances

stances to Ricardo the day after his marriage with Louisa; he was greatly shocked to hear of this horrible instance of his father's depraved and wicked conduct, and sent a party to escort the Signor Valvano to his residence, that he might endeavour by his attention to him to make him forget the wrongs he had received from his parent.

Ugo had not made known to Valvano by whom he was instigated in his conduct toward him; Ricardo had therefore a painful task to perform, and he looked forward with anxiety to the moment when he should be obliged

obliged to develope the dark designs of the late Marchese against his life.

The second day the attendants returned, bringing with them the much-wronged Signor Valvano. Ricardo on beholding his form wasted with his long confinement, his pallid cheeks, and the infirm state to which he was reduced, could not command his feelings, and was obliged to retire to endeavour to recover from his agitation. When he had in some measure fitted himself for the interview, he requested the presence of the Signor Valvano in his apartment, where he related to him the substance of Ugo's story, though not without several interruptions from the

the acuteness of his sensations in thus being obliged to expose the base conduct of a father.

However enraged the Signor Valvano might be at the conduct of the late Marchese de Carlentini, yet he could not but feel interested for Ricardo, whose grief he endeavoured to assuage by assuring him that as his enemy was no more he would endeavour to forget the wrongs he had received, and then embraced Ricardo as a further proof that against him he had no cause of complaint, as he was far from revenging the wrongs he had received from the father on his innocent son; he however requested to be

left

left alone that day, and promised on the next he would have the pleasure of being introduced to the Marchesa, and of reassuring Ricardo of his perfect amity with him.

Ricardo was greatly consoled by the conduct of the Signor Valvano, and in the society of Louisa he found a charm that drove from his mind all unpleasant thoughts. She was to him every thing that he could wish, and there was now but one circumstance that gave him the least uneasiness, and that was how to provide for his children should he have any. It was on this head that he had held so long a conversation with the venerable abbot before he took his depart-

departure from the Castello on the day of his nuptials, and though the abbot had in some measure relieved his mind on that head, yet still there were circumstances attendant on the steps he should be obliged to take that hurt the feelings of Ricardo. Fearful of creating a moment's uneasiness in the breast of Louisa, he had not said a word to her on the subject, and awaited the time when it would be necessary to explain to her his situation, well knowing how important it is in this sublunary state to seize every moment of happiness, and to forbear to cast a shade sooner than occasion required on the happiness his Louisa seemed to enjoy.

The

The next morning Ricardo had the pleasure of introducing the Signor Valvano to the Marchesa ; he seemed struck with her beauty, and complimented Ricardo on his taste. He was perfectly silent on the treatment he had received from the late Marchese, and Ricardo felt happy that the subject so unpleasant to his feelings was not renewed.

The hours now rapidly passed in the round of amusement which Ricardo prepared, solicitous to amuse his Louisa, and to prevent the Signor Valvano from ruminating on the injurious treatment he had received. Sometimes they would embark in his gondola on the stream which

which flowed through the valley, and land at a pavillion which was erected in a spot enriched by the beautics of Nature and exertions of Art. There they would partake of a refreshment, while the soft Sicilian harmony from the musicians who were placed in a retired glen floated on the air, and seemed like the effect of enchantment. .

Some days now passed, and the Signor Valvano was obliged to depart for Palermo, in order to regain his possessions, which on supposition of his death had fallen into the hands of his nearest relative. He took leave of the Marchese and Marchesa, and promised, as soon as his affairs would allow him, to retnrn to the Castello.

The

The Count de Leoni still remained, and Ricardo found in him whatever he had anticipated on their first meeting. He was gratitude itself for the kindness he had received from Ricardo, and took every opportunity that presented of manifesting it; he seemed to be entirely weaned from his fatal propensity to gambling, of which he had seen the dreadful effects. He staid a week after the departure of the Signor Valvano, and then with much regret left the happy pair at the Castello.

Ricardo in the conversation of Louisa and the Signora Bononi felt not a wish for other society; he daily grew more

and

and more attached to the Marchesa, and hourly did he bless the day that made her his.

He employed some of his time in directing various alterations to be made in the north wing of the Castello, and banished the gloom which had so long reigned in the Hall by making large casements, which descended to the floor and opened on the lawn, where sometimes he permitted his happy vassals to assemble, and with Louisa would delight to see them enjoy their innocent sports by the light of the nocturnal luminary, which in that climate almost equalled the brightness of day.

Amid

CHAP. VII.

TO RICARDO MARCHESE DE CARLENTINI.

"At length the long-dreaded hour is fast approaching; life will soon cease to flow in my veins, my heart beats with a slow and languid motion, my body is emaciated, and my strength begins

begins to fail. Fatal symptoms of dissolution! Oh! how my soul recoils with terror at the idea that when the link is broken which connects me to the world, when my soul wings its rapid flight, and trembling and confused stands before the tribunal of justice, what will it offer in extenuation of the dreadful crime it will be charged with? alas! what excuse can be made for a murderer?

"How often at the hour of midnight have I started from my restless couch, how often has my disturbed imagination made me think I beheld, slow stalking through my chamber, the blood

 streaming

streaming from the side, the murdered form of ——

"As yet I am not able to name the victim of that accursed hour when I first embrued my hands in innocent blood. Marchese de Carlentini, thou wilt hear it too soon; let my body rest in the tomb, do not in thy just indignation leave it to be consumed by the scorching rays of the sun or the ravenous beasts of prey.

"Short is my tale, yet 'tis long ere I can summon resolution to begin it. I wish to supplicate for pardon ere I confess my guilt; I wish to tell what have been my sufferings, in order

to

to raise some pity, even in the breasts of those I have injured.

"Conscience with her endless sting has deep pierced my heart, the agonizing pangs prevent the influence of slumber on my aching eyes, society has long been a torment to me, for surely every one must read my guilt in my perturbed looks.

"A day has elapsed since I wrote the above; I am unable to continue this intended exposition of my deeds of horror without renewing in all the bitterness of recollection my guilty acts; but I must do it; I must com-

 mence

mence the recital while my trembling hand is able to guide my pen.

" Oh! ye who peruse these lines, reflect that the hand that traced them is no more endued with vital motion, that the heart which suggested the deed of horror contained in these pages is returning to its original dust, and that the soul of Grimaldi is suffering for the guilty acts done in his days of life.

" Marchese de Carlentini, thou art gone before me; repentance never entered thy bosom; with all thy load of dark and deadly crimes thou hast left this world. Soon we shall meet; but oh! the horrors of that meeting!

ing! Let me not ruminate on it, lest it bewilder my senses, and incapacitate me from my present purpose.

"About twenty years ago, when only the experience of thirty years had dawned on my mind, I was appointed confessor to the castle. The family of the Marchese consisted of his wife, the amiable Theodora, and you, Ricardo, whose infant tongue had just learned to express the first endearing words of childhood.

"Two years glided away in domestic tranquillity; the Marchese appeared to be greatly attached to Theodora, whose whole happiness seemed

to be centered in him and yourself. The Marchese at the expiration of that time went to Palermo. That journey was fatal to the peace of Theodora, and was the consequence of plunging me into a horrible abyss of guilt.

"When the Marchese returned his conduct was entirely changed, he became gloomy and morose; he no longer took any pleasure in the society of Theodora, on the contrary, he diligently avoided being near her, and I often used to behold him on the hills walking with folded arms, apparently deeply ruminating on the subject that caused his change of conduct.

"It

" It was from accidentally overhearing the converstion of some of the domestics who had attended him to Palermo that I began to have a suspicion of the cause that agitated the bosom of the Marchese.

It appeared that he had lost while at Palermo vast sums of money at the gambling table, and that he was obliged to dispose of a considerable part of his estate to discharge them.

" His conduct to the Marchesa became harsh, and even cruel; frequently have I surprised her when she had been giving vent to her sorrows by floods of tears; my heart sympathized with

her unfortunate situation. Would to Heaven it had ever done so; what horror, what distress, what torturous pangs of an accusing conscience should I have avoided.

" One evening the Marchese sent to my apartment, to desire me to meet him on the North Terrace. Well I recollect that, without knowing why, a sudden chill seized my frame at the message. It was a sad presentiment of dreadful consequences which resulted from it.

" As soon as I appeared on the terrace he motioned me to follow him; I obey-

I obeyed; and leaving the Castle, we entered into the valley.

" ' This is a pleasant evening, father Grimaldi,' said the Marchese.

" ' It is, my Lord,' I replied; for the first time raising my eyes on his countenance, which was pale and agitated. ' Such an evening as this, my Lord,' I continued, ' sooths the mind, even when labouring under heavy calamities; it breathes peace and serenity to the woe-worn breast.'

" ' To light sorrows it may, father; but where grief is deep seated, the tempestuous fury of the elements is more

composing than the mild serene weather which only tortures by presenting a scene of tranquillity to the view which is foreign to the thought. I speak as I feel, father.'

"'I am truly concerned for it, my Lord, I replied; indeed I have of late noticed that some deep seated melancholy oppresses you.'

"The Marchese did not make any answer, but seemed to be deeply reflecting on some important subject. I could observe that his countenance grew dark, and an expression of determined resolution pervaded his countenance. I walked by his side till we entered into

to the forest, wrapt in wonder as to what would be the consequence of this meeting.

"The Marchese struck into an unfrequented path, he looked once or twice cautiously around him, and then addressed me in words to this effect:—

'Is it not hard, father, to be surrounded with what the world calls friends, and yet not to be able to select from them one in whom it would be safe to confide?'

'It is, certainly, my Lord, a matter of concern,' I replied, anxious to know

know whither this conversation would tend.

" 'And yet, Grimaldi, that is my case, and is the cause of my melancholy. Father, it lays in your power to restore peace to my breast.'

" 'In mine, my Lord?' said I, 'name what it is you would have me perform; great indeed would be my happiness if it is in my power to be of service to you.'

" 'Grimaldi, I must first impose on you an oath of secresy.'

" 'I was somewhat disturbed at this,

as

as it seemed to infer that what he had in view was of a nature that shunned the light.

" 'You hesitate, father; 'tis enough; I shall drop the subject.' He then turned about.

" 'No, my Lord,' I exclaimed, 'you shall not have it to say that you have no one in whom you can place confidence. I will take the oath,' said I, holding up my crucifix; 'by this I swear never to reveal, during your lifetime, what you shall think fit to repose in my bosom.'

" 'I am satisfied, Grimaldi, thou art now my friend,' replied the Marchese,

chese; 'tis concerning the Marchesa I would speak to you. You have yet to learn that I married her in hopes that her uncle would on his demise settle on her his immense possessions. On my arrival at Palermo I unfortunately fell in with a set of villains, who took advantage of my propensity for gambling. In fine, I lost all my property save this estate. In this exigency I turned my thoughts to the Marchesa's uncle. From his well-known attachment to his money I well knew he would not assist me with any; and in hopes he had made his will, I hired a ruffian to destroy him. He succeeded.'

" Here

" Here the Marchese stopped, seeing the horror which was depicted in my countenance at his relation.

" 'Grimaldi,' said he with a severe look, 'recollect your oath and protestations. Am I yet to look for a friend?'

" He said these last words in a tone of voice which seemed to supplicate me not to desert him; at least I felt them so, and I replied—

" 'No, my Lord, you have a faithful servant before you. I pray you to proceed.'

" 'I

" 'I was, however, rightly punished,' continued the Marchese, 'for my precipitate conduct; for Theodora's uncle had not made any will, consequently, the whole of his property went to another relation. Money I must have, or never more shew myself at Palermo. Now, Grimaldi, I was thinking of a second marriage.'

" 'A second marriage, my Lord,' said I, 'you surely forget that the Marchesa Theodora'—

" 'Still lives, you would add, Grimaldi,' said the Marchese interrupting me. 'Ah father, it is there I want your friendship, your assistance.

" 'My

" 'My Lord', said I, growing pale with horror, 'you would not surely'—

" 'I do not mean to hurt Theodora,' said the Marchese; 'do not, Grimaldi, anticipate what I have no idea of. I have formed my plan, but without your concurrence it is of no avail. Will you assist me, Grimaldi?'

" 'In any thing short of the destruction of the Marchesa,' I replied, 'you may command me, my Lord.'

" 'Grimaldi, I shall look on you as my preserver, nay more, as the preserver of the young Ricardo from future

ture penury, my gratitude will be unbounded.'

" He then proceeded to inform me of his intention, which was, to confine the Marchesa in some part of the Castello, the size of which, and the number of deserted chambers it contained, rendered it an easy matter to keep perfectly secure from all observation the hapless object of his persecution. Meantime the world was to be deceived by a report of her death; in order that he might be able to enter into an alliance with some lady whose rich possessions would make amends for his losses and disappointments.

" Unfortunate

" Unfortunate Theodora! I who ought to have been thy protector, and exerted the authority of the church in thy behalf, was unhappily influenced by thy most bitter enemy to assist him in his horrible unprincipled schemes against thy peace and liberty; and, as it afterwards fatally proved, against thy life.'

" I must now lay down my pen; the pains I endure would be dreadful, even to the innocent, who look forward to an hereafter; as seamen in a storm, to the peaceful haven. What then must they be to me, joined to the anguish of a guilty conscience, and anticipating the punishment allotted to the murderer.

" When

" When the Marchese had informed me of his plans, we returned from the shades of the forest and proceeded toward the Castello. The deserted and lonely situation of the South Angle Tower caught his attention, and he determined, if it was not in too ruinous a condition, to make it the prison of the Marchesa. We lost no time, for he was impatient to commence his cruel and unmerited persecution of the gentle Theodora, and taking a lamp, examined the place. In the tower we found an apartment which seemed to have been formerly a place of confinement, as the casements were all boarded up, except one, which looked into a solitary court, and which gave light

light to the place. Here security seemed to reign, and here it was resolved Theodora should be brought.

" The next day, purposely to expedite his plans, the Marchese had some words with Theodora, and the result was his ordering the door that led to her suit of apartments to be locked, and no one admitted to her but her own domestic. This step was only preparatory to others more violent, for he soon after forbade the servant to attend her lady, and brought her provisions into the outer chamber every day himself.

" Her unmerited confinement, and the unkindness

unkindness of the Marchese, afflicted Theodora so much that she fell ill, and I was ordered to attend her. The dew of sensibility was not yet scorched up by the fervor of my wishes to serve the Marchese, and I could not behold her sufferings without commiserating them; knowing too as I did the fate that awaited her. The impatience of the Marchese increasing, by his desire I prepared a potion for the unfortunate Theodora which had the power of arresting for a time the vital motion, making the taker appear as if dead. With a trembling hand I gave her the fatal draught, which the hapless victim to a barbarous husband unconsciously drank.

"As soon as it had taken effect, and the Marchesa lay motionless on her couch, I acquainted the household with her death. Great was the grief of all the domestics, who had every reason to love her. They rushed in crowds to her chamber, and loudly lamented her loss.

"Under the idea that the disorder she died of was infectious, I restrained the eagerness of the servants, who wished to kiss her hand as the last proof of their affection, and would not permit any of them to advance nearer than the door of the chamber.

"Preparations were made instantly for

for the interment, and the inanimate Marchesa was placed in the coffin, the lid of which I pretended to fasten myself.

"The funeral ceremony was to take place at midnight; and about two hours before that period, asisted by the Marchese, I removed her from her dreary abode, and carried her along the silent halls and corridores which led to the South Angle Tower, leaving her on a couch which had been previously brought there; and locking the door of her future prison, we proceeded to her former apartments; when having put into the coffin a weight equal to her body, I fastened it up, and at the time appointed

appointed it was carried into the chapel, and laid in the tomb prepared for it with the same solemnity as if it had been the mortal remains of Theodora.

"The Marchese for some time confined himself to his chamber, and appeared greatly to lament the loss of the Marchesa; but he rejoiced in private at the success of his well-concerted plans, and loaded me with presents and expressions of gratitude that drove away all compunction from my bosom, and I became hardened against all emotion of pity for the Marchesa.

"The next night I went to the

tower; I unlocked the door, and as the gleams of my lamp penetrated the gloom that reigned in the apartment, I beheld, setting by the side of her couch, the unfortunate Theodora.

"I will not attempt to describe my feelings at the sight of her; I evidently slunk from the penetrating glances of her eyes. She noticed my emotion.

" 'You start, father, at beholding me; tell me what is the reason of my being in this dismal chamber. Sure you have no design against my life. Oh! father, do I then—can it be possible, that I see in you an agent of the Marchese?'

" 'Your

" 'Your life is safe, Marchesa,' I replied, 'ask no more questions, as they will not be answered. These are your provisions; to-morrow at this hour I will bring you more;' so saying I departed, and left the hapless Theodora to bewail her sad fate.

" The next night I entered her chamber. She besought me to take pity on her, to restore her to liberty, to bring her little Ricardo to her. She even threw herself on her knees before me, and laying hold of my habit, with her eyes streaming with tears of heartfelt woe, entreated me to let her know what were the designs of the Marchese respecting her.

" I tore myself from her grasp, she fell to the floor with a dreadful groan, having greatly hurt herself, and I rushed out of the chamber without assisting her.

" The Marchese in a short time went to Palermo, leaving me, as usual, at the Castello. You, Ricardo, were then near five years of age. You had already forgot your mother, who still existed in her dreary confinement, whither I constantly brought her provisions once in every three days; for a report prevailed among the peasants that the southern chambers of the Castle were haunted; and one man affirmed, that passing by the Angle Tower at a late hour

hour one night, he had heard deep groans, and had seen a light gleam from the shattered casements of the tower.

" I was greatly shocked to hear the reports that went about, knowing them partly to be founded in truth. I however affected to disbelieve them, and endeavoured to silence the propagators of the tales; for I feared lest by some means it might lead to an examination of the Southern Chamber, when the Marchesa would be discovered.

" The Marchese soon after arrived from Palemro. The first question he

asked me was concerning Theodora. When he heard that she was well, he looked disappointed, and the relation of the account concering the tower, and the increasing terrors of the domestics, (for none of them would now on any account approach the ruins after sun-set) did not appear to contribute to his repose. He looked at me with an expression in his countenance which told the dark designs which he was planning before he give them utterance.

"'Father,' said he, 'self-preservation is the first law of nature; it is no sin in such a cause to commit any act, however unpleasant to the feelings or repugnant to laws made in the cool moments

moments of reflection. If we see a venemous reptile it becomes a duty to destroy it, not only on account of our own safety, but also to prevent it doing an injury to another. Doubtless, father, your opinion wanders not far from mine in this instance.'

"'There certainly are cases, my Lord,' I replied, where it is no sin to conduct ourselves as you mention; but what would you infer from your question? which, pardon me, is so foreign from the subject we were conversing about.'

"'No, father,' replied the Marchese, 'it is not so foreign from that subject as you seem to think. I am

glad to find you of the same sentiments as myself. Now, father, what if I were to tell you that the envenomed serpent I but now hinted at is— your prisoner.'

" I started at at his words, and in an instant clearly comprehended his meaning.

" ' Listen to me, Grimaldi. Should Theodora escape; should any person, curious to know the reason of the lights that have been seen and the noises that have been heard in the Angle Tower, invade its privacy, and release the Marchesa, think you that she will be silent? No, she will represent my conduct to the King; and your's, father, in asisting me,

me, will doubtless be laid before the Pope. If you see as you ought your danger and mine, Grimaldi, you will not hesitate. In the dead of night, a single blow will release us from all fears. Take this,' said he, drawing a dagger from the folds of his vest, 'and do away the cause of our disquietude.'

" Hardly conscious of what I did, I grasped the fatal instrument. My blood chilled with the sensations that pervaded my frame, while the Marchese continued:—

" 'I repeat again, father, the necessity of this step. Our danger is great,

and great must be the effort to preserve ourselves.'

" By such conversation did he gain me over to his horrid purposes. I thought I saw the danger he described, and even grew impatient to perpetrate the crime that has embittered my existence.

" The Marchese left me not that day; he would not allow me an opportunity to ponder on the deed I was goingto perform; he parted not from me till the midnight hour had tolled.

" Surely if I had but for a moment reflected I never could have committed the

the dreadful act; and this, in all probability, the Marchese was fully aware of.

" Grasping the dagger in my hand, I hasted to the Angle Tower. My hapless victim started at the sight of me; the rays of the lamp gleamed on the dagger; she shrieked with the dreadful apprehensions that arose in her mind.

" That shriek was her last!

" When I saw the blood-stained form of the Marchesa lying on the floor, bereft of animation, what sensations of horror arose in my bosom. Alas!

the deed was perpetrated. Hastily I left the chamber; I fled along the dreary corridores, thinking I was pursued by avenging furies, urged on by the blood-stained spectre of Theodora.

"Once I ventured as I crossed the hall to turn round, when slow pacing amongst the columns appeared her form; the garments were dyed in blood, in her hand she bore a pale burning lamp which illumined her features, that were marked with the agonies of death; struck with horror, I rushed into the apartment of the Marchese, pale and haggard with the dreadful emotions excited by my fears and the deed I had perpetrated.

"'Is

" 'Is it done?' said the Marchese.

" Yes, I replied, and I am condemned to be a wretch for ever. Oh! that I could recal the past hour.

" 'Consider, my friend,' replied the Marchese, 'that this step was necessary to our peace; nay more, to our safety. Now we are secure. The dead tell no tales.'

" No? Marchese; think you not the soul of Theodora is now supplicating for justice at the throne of retribution against her murderer? and she will obtain it!

" The

"The Marchese endeavoured to soothe the perturbation of my mind; but from that hour never have I had one moment's peace; my life has been one scene of horror and misery; yet I clung to existence, fearful of worse torments when my mortal frame had returned to its original dust.

"From that time I never had courage to enter the southern chambers; And the remains of Theodora have lain in the Tower more than fifteen years.

"You, no doubt, Ricardo, observed the agitation I endured when you declared your wish of inhabiting the

the South Angle Tower; the place where your mother was murdered, and where her remains still lie.

"Greatly alarmed lest you should find some means to enter the place, and discover the horrid deed, I suddenly formed the resolution of letting you have the keys, determined to alarm you in such a manner as to prevent your entering that part of the Castle again. You know what followed. From fears of my personal safety I dissuaded you from taking a trombone, and before the time that you were to receive the keys I entered the South Hall, and made what little preparations were necessary. Although so many years had

elapsed

elapsed since the commission of the horrible crime which the privacy of the tower concealed, yet it is impossible to describe my agitation on again entering that part of the Castle.

"I hastily retired from the place, and met you in the North Hall. The sound and appearances which alarmed you so much were caused by me. When I found you seemingly resolved to enter the passage which led to the fatal tower, I determined to prevent you, and thrusting my arm through a hole in the partition which seperated a small chamber I was in from the corridore, brandished a large sword, at the same time uttering those dismal sounds which, increased

by

by the echo, almost alarmed myself. My plan succeeded, and you fled.

" Confident that the Marchese would not allow you to examine that part of the Castle, I referred you to him. You know the rest.

" Thus at length have I concluded my tale of horror. At the throne of the Most High I shall soon give an account of my offences, and receive the punishment that awaits such crimes.

" I feel the chilly grasp of death seizing on my frame. Is there no avoiding dissolution? Oh! would I could hide myself in some dark cave where the

the searching eyes of the sun never penetrated, where the breeze of morning or the zephyrs of evening never wandered; but in vain do I wish to avoid what all mortals must at one time or other meet.

" Ricardo, pity my sufferings! do not heap curses on my guilty head!"

Ricardo sighed deeply as he finished the perusal of Grimaldi's confession; the sad fate of his mother dwelt heavy at his heart, and the groan of filial commiseration oft burst from his agonized breast.

" Oh!

" Oh ! my sainted mother, " he exclaimed, " and do your precious remains lie unentombed in the dreary prison where the fell assassin pierced your innocent heart? This moment will I go and water them with my tears: dreadful indeed is the mystery contained in the gloomy recesses of the Tower."

He arose from his seat with an intention of exploring the dungeon where the remains of the Marchesa lay, but on looking at the declining shadow of the sun, he found the day was too far spent to admit of his carrying his design into effect, in the present disturbed state of his mind; he was not sorry

at

at being prevented going, and he determined to employ the intervening hours between the present and the melancholy spectacle that he well knew would meet his eyes of the sad remains of a murdered mother, in composing the agitation of his bosom, to render him able to endure the sad scene.

It was a gleam of comfort to his soul to know that his father was not guilty, as he supposed he was, of the murder of Signor Valvano; and the hour of repast drawing nigh, he endeavoured to compose himself as much as possible, in order to conceal from

Louisa

Louisa the grief that oppressed his his bosom.

But her anxious gaze when she saw him enter the hall pale and agitated, soon rendered his endeavours useless; and when with fond solicitude she inquired the cause of the evident melancholy that oppressed him, he found himself unable to frame any other reason for it than the true one, which he then related to her.

The gentle heart of Louisa swelled at the sad recital, and sorrowfully passed away the time devoted to the banquet; when it was concluded, Ricardo returned to the privacy of his chamber,

chamber, and passed the hours in painful reflections on the dark deed which had deprived him of a mother.

The sun had long withdrawn his beams, and the moon now began to shew her bright form above the summit of the hills that bounded the horizon, when Ricardo, leaving his chamber walked pensively on the lawn; raising his eyes, he beheld the rugged walls of the South Angle Tower illumined by the silver beams of the nocturnal lamp. Sadly he gazed on them, while the dreadful act that had been performed in its gloomy interior

returned

returned to his recollection with increasing grief.

Unable to support the painful emotions that arose in his breast, he slowly returned to the Castello, to seek in his Louisa's converse that comfort he was so much in need of; determined, that ere another night covered with its shades the face of the creation, that the remains of his mother should be consigned with all holy rites and ceremonies of the church, to the tomb; that done, he hoped that time would soften the acuteness of the sorrow he then endured.

Some of his domestics were ordered to

to attend him at an early hour in the morning with the steward of the Castello, in order to assist him in his intended examination of the Angle Tower, whose dreary walls for fifteen years had never reveberated to the voice of man.

CHAP. VIII.

It wanted one hour of midnight when the Padre Bernardo left his cell. Entering the chapel he was surprised to observe, near the skreen that divided it, a light; and curious to know who it could be that at that lonely hour visited the chapel, he shrouded his lamp, and slowly and cautiously proceeded forward. He now heard a low whispering, and soon after saw a man

enveloped in a cloak in converse with a nun, who had thrown of her veil. The beams of her lamp shone bright on her countenance, which rivetted the attention of the monk. Large expressive dark eyes, with eye-brows beautifully arched; her cheeks the residence of the blushing rose, and her coral lips inviting the rapturous kiss.

This nun, thought the monk, must surely be the one mentioned to me by the Demon; true it is she is not quite so enchanting as the lovely female I beheld in the pavillion yet her beauties interest me, and the flames of love arise in my breast

The monk now started at beholding the nun unlock the gate of the skreen, and the man enter and follow her toward the portal that led to the interior of the convent.

"He now determined to watch them; and passing through the gate, which was left open, he cautiously advanced along a passage, and ascending a broad flight of stairs that appeared at the end, entered a corridore, where observing a light streaming from a door that was not closed he approached it, and saw the man who having laid aside his cloak, was seated by the side of the nun, with whom he appeared in earnest conversation.

 "Ber-

" Bernardo now beheld a sight which filled him with rage. The Signor leant toward the nun, and throwing his arm around her neck, joined his lips to hers.

The monk was ready to burst into the chamber and separate the fond pair, but a better plan was formed by his ready invention; he took his sandals off his feet, and uttering a deep hollow groan threw back the door, and hastily running to the extremity of the passage, shrouded his lamp, and awaited with impatience the result of his scheme.

After some time the monk beheld the

the Signor come to the door and cautiously look around him; he then went back, and soon after appeared with the nun. Hastily they left the corridore, and descending the stairs, the monk, who followed them at a distance, saw the nun open the gate in the skreen, and when her lover was gone she locked it, and tremblingly retraced her steps toward her cell.

At the foot of the stairs that led to the chambers belonging to the sisters of Santa Catherina stood the monk. Agatha, when she beheld his tall figure, and found that her guilty acts were discovered, trembled with sudden horror as the leaf of the aspen to the restless

breeze of night. She uttered a faint scream, and was sinking on the floor, when Bernardo hastily rushed forward, and caught her in his arms.

He threw back the veil which covered her countenance, and as the rays of the lamp shone on it he gazed with unsated delight on her lovely features, while a flush crimsoned his checks, and his heart beat with increasing violence against his side.

He however checked the emotions he felt, though with great difficulty, while he thus questioned the nun:—

"Daughter,

"Daughter, who was it that but now I saw in company with thee?"

The nun tremblingly raised her eyes on the monk, who now held her arm. She beheld herself irrevocably lost if she could not cause a sensation of pity for her to arise in his breast; and in a supplicating voice she replied:—

"Holy father, have mercy on me. I acknowledge my crime. Forced within these walls by the cruel order of a father, because my heart was susceptible of the passions of love, I did not conceive myself bound to obey the rigid rules of a convent. As yet too the last ceremony has not been performed.

My lover has contrived to obtain an entrance to the chapel, and I have admitted him into the convent; but, father, if ever your heart felt the soft passion of love, if ever you knew the pangs of parting with the object you held dearest on earth, I conjure you, by the remembrance of those emotions, to pity my situation."

The monk from the violence of his feelings was silent; his cowl he had thrown back, and Agatha raising her supplicating eyes to his countenance, read there that he not only forgave, but that the beauties of her person had excited his admiration.

The

The terror which had agitated her by degrees subsided, and a softer sensation assumed their place; the pallid hue which usually overspread the cheeks of the monk had given way to a crimson tint, his eyes were fixed on her, there was a languishing expression in them, his other features were handsome, and his years seemed not greatly to exceed her own.

"What," said the monk in a softened voice, "what if I were to conceal the knowledge I have obtained of thy proceedings out of pity for your situation. I demand but one thing in return."

"Name it, father; what is there I would not do to shew my gratitude?"

"Thou must then promise not to see the cavalier more," said the monk.

"I will sacrifice every thing to your wishes," blushingly replied Agatha; "I will not allow him again entrance in the convent."

The Demon from his gloomy abode beheld the meeting of Bernardo and the nun, who long had been the votary of vice, whose soul confessed his sway; he saw in her a fit tool to further his designs against the monk, he made her breast glow with the base passion of sensual

sensual love, and caused the fevered languishment of desire to rage without control through her frame. He did not, however, intend that the monk should so easily attain his ends; and he determined to prevent him from fulfilling his wishes that night.

The monk, satisfied with the promise made by Agatha, that she would no more admit her lover, by a sudden motion of which he was almost ignorant gently pressed her hand. The soft pressure was returned—he looked at the nun—their eyes glowed with passion—he gently drew her toward him—he put his arm around her slender waist—he bent his head till his face came

near hers—he felt he inhaled her breath, sweet as the fragrance of the zephyrs impregnated with the odors of May—their lips joined—what ecstacy did it impart to the monk!—a mist swam before his eyes—his whole frame was convulsed as he pressed Agatha yet more closely to his bosom.....

Just at that moment a distant pace was heard. The monk hastily looked around, as did also the nun, and beheld advancing through the gloom the form of the abbess.

The monk shrouded his lamp, and muttering a curse at thus being disappointed, in having the cup of bliss dashed from

from his lips at the moment he was going to take its delicious contents, begged Agatha to be the next night at eleven in the convent cemetery, where he would meet her; he then hastily retreated toward the chapel, and Agatha flew to her cell.

But what they had supposed to be the abbess was nothing more than a delusive form, raised by the Demon to part them ere the languor of satiety had seized on the monk.

Bernardo retracing his steps arrived in his cell, where gloomily he threw himself on his pallet. Sleep, however, rested not on his eye-lids; but while

while he regretted his disappointment, he comforted himself with the idea that the next night would be more propitious to his wishes.

" Agatha had not been in the convent of Santa Catherina more than a year; the ceremony of her taking the vows of seclusion were reserved to grace the approaching festival of the Santa Catherina. Whatever was the occasion of her being obliged to reside in a place so ill suited to her disposition, she gave great proof of her being an adept in all manner of vice, since she had been within those holy walls; but her actions being hitherto clouded by an impenetrable veil which she had the art

to

to throw over them, hitherto escaped detection, and even suspicion. Early on the same morning she entered the convent her conductors had stopped the carriage at a village in order to procure some refrshment; she was ushered into a small chamber, where a table was spread with the coarse fare the cottage afforded, but the heart of Agatha was the abode of sorrow at being obliged to leave the pleasures of the world; she neglected to partake of the morning repast, and absorbed in melancholy reflections which caused the frequent tear to steal down her lovely cheeks, passed the moments leaning on her white arm at the small casement which was not far from the ground.

A ca-

A cavalier passing by on horseback observed her grief; he was struck too with her beauty, and he advanced to the basement.

"Fair Signora," said he "I grieve to see the distress you so apparantly labor under; can I be of any service to you?"

"Alas! Signor," said the weeping Agatha, "I am against my will doomed to reside in a convent; that is the cause of my tears; in a few hours I shall be inclosed in those hated walls."

"Cruel fate," said the cavalier "that you,

you, Signora, possessing such charms, so fitted to adorn the world, should be secluded from it. Sure" continued he, in a low voice, "you could easily descend from the casement; and if you would permit me to place you on my steed, you would in a short time be far from hence. The moments are precious; will you trust yourself with me?"

Agatha hesitated not in her reply. "I will willingly do it," she replied. "The Saints grant me success."

"She then arose from her seat, and was attempting to descend from the

the casement when her conductors came out of the cottage. Terrified at the sight of them, she hastily drew back, and the cavalier, disappointed of his lovely prize, rode away.

He however watched the men who had the care of the handsome Agatha, and saw them soon after conduct her to the carriage, which he followed for some time, till it stopped at the entrance of the convent of Santa Catherina.

He passed by at the moment that Agatha was entering its holy walls; she turned round at the noise of his horse's feet, and eyed him with a look

a look so hopeless and sorrowful that he determined if possible to effect her deliverance from her sad destiny.

He stopped at a village which was near the convent, and in the evening attended the vespers in the chapel. He placed himself near the skreen, and observed Agatha, who raised her veil on purpose to make herself known.

Her beauties had interested him, and he saw that could he by any means liberate her, that there was little doubt but that he should be amply repaid for the danger he might encounter.

After

After the service was concluded he left the chapel, and by the light of the moon examined the lofty walls that inclosed the extensive pile of building. No where, however, could he perceive the least likelihood of succeeding in any attempt to scale them; and he repaired to the village despairing of being able to effect his purpose.

"The next morning he renewed his endeavours, but still he was unsuccessful; and not wishing to be seen by any of the inhabitants of the monastery, he concealed himself in the shade of an extensive forest, which was on the south side of the building.

Here

Here as he wandered his attention was caught by some ruins which appeared to have been formerly a small chapel; it was of great antiquity, covered with ivy, and part of the roof which had fallen was almost hid by the long waving grass. Solitary and deserted was the spot; "the thistle shook there its lonely head, the moss whistled to the wind."

As he was examining the place he found a flight of rough steps which appeared to lead to some place beneath, probably to a cemetery. He cautiously descended them, and found himself when arrived at the bottom in a vaulted chamber. It, however, had not been appro-

appropriated to the purpose of a burial place, and the cavalier was on the point of quitting it, when he discovered a door in the wall.

As the only light which entered was from the aperture above, the cavalier did not think proper to attempt to open that door without having a lamp with him; and as he felt curious to know what place it concealed, he determined to return there in the afternoon with implements for procuring a light. Leaving the place he then proceeded to the village, and as he passed by the walls of the convent cast many an anxious look at them, for within their lofty boundaries was the beautiful Agatha.

Toward

Toward the evening he again repaired to the ruins of the chapel in the forest, and when he was in the vaulted chamber he lit a lamp, and advanced to the door, which was strengthened by plates of iron, and appeared to be strongly fastened on the other side. Time, however, had for a series of years been busily employed on the massy bolts and hinges; and when the cavalier endeavoured to burst it open, the door gave way to his efforts, and fell into a narrow passage.

Taking up his lamp, the cavalier passed over the fallen door, and proceeded along the passage some time, often stopping to trim his lamp, which burnt dim-

ly

ly surrounded by the foul air which had probably for more than a century been pent up in that subterraneous place.

The passage often varied in its width and length; in some places it seemed formed by Nature, and in others was evidently made by Art; the great length of it fatigued the cavalier who sat down on some of the fragments of the side wall which had given way, in order to rest himself. The cold damp chill, however, warned him to keep in motion, and he arose and proceeded forward, till at length he came to a flight of steps, which having ascended, he plainly heard to his great delight the voices

of

of the monks chanting the vesper service.

The reader will recollect in the pages which the monk perused of the volume written by Bartolo, which contained the melancholy tale of the fair Isabella de Tracy, and of her savage destroyer Leonardi de Vicensio, it was mentioned that the monastery was partly erected over the place where the Castello, the scene of those dreadful events recorded by him, formerly stood. And the cavalier had happened to find out a passage which led from the Castello to the chapel in the forest; and which had served as a means of retreat in times of danger to the inhabitants.

At the top of the steps was a door, which the cavalier was fearful of attempting to open while the monks were in the chapel, for by the sound of their voices he was convinced he was not far from it. The fastenings of the door were on the inside, and consisted of large bolts which ran far into the stone frame; and the cavalier rightly conjectured that it was so secured to prevent the egress of the inhabitants of the monastic pile.

He sat down on the steps, awaiting the conclusion of the service, revolving in his mind the probable consequences of his daring enterprize. Should the passage he was in, open to the convent,

it would be easy to carry his schemes into effect; but should it communicate with the monastery, and which he had every reason to believe from the nearness of the voices of the monks, he was as far from the object of his wishes as ever; unless, indeed, he could find out the communication with it and the convent, but that was a thing which seemed almost impossible.

In the midst of his rumination the service was concluded, and he heard the departing steps of the monks so plainly as to leave it no longer a doubt where the passage would lead him to. He now waited till silence had resumed her reign, when he essayed to draw

back the bolts that secured the portal.

This was a work attended with some difficulty, for the bolts were so rusted in their holds, that without much trouble they would not move. At length however, all of them were drawn out of the stone work, and the cavalier listened if any sounds of approching paces should meet his ear.

All, however, was silent; and from the time he had been in unfastening the door, it was probable that the monks had retired to their cells; and consequently there was no danger in his emerging

emerging from the subterraneous passage.

The door slowly moved to the efforts of the cavalier, with a harsh grating sound, which often made him stop lest the noise should alarm the attention of the monks. And at length he entered a small chamber; this he crossed, and opening a door on the opposite side, found himself in a lofty vaulted corridore.

Recollecting the direction of the sounds of the monks' voices when performing the evening service, he advanced that way, and opening a large

 folding

folding portal, entered the well-known chapel of the monastery.

He advanced toward the skreen, and looked anxiously about for some way by which he might enter the convent; but his search was fruitless. He, however, determined on taking some method to let Agatha know the discovery he had made, and to request her to be in the chapel at an appointed hour the next night in order to consult on the means of her escape.

As he found it would not be possible to make any further attempts till he had seen her, he now retraced his steps, carefully fastening the door by which he

he had gained admittance into the monastery, and traversing the long subterraneous passage at length found himself in the ruins of the chapel.

The next morning he attended the service, and stationed himself near the skreen; he however found it impossible to effect his purpose without fear of a discovery. He saw Agatha, who was the last of the long train of nuns, and who often turned her head as she was leaving the chapel to gaze on the cavalier.

In the evening, however, he was more fortunate, the increasing gloom made his actions less liable to be ob-

 served,

served, and as Agatha was leaving the place, the contrived to throw a paper toward her through the grating of the skreen, and which falling near her feet she unobserved stooped down and picking it up concealed it in her bosom. The cavalier then, greatly pleased at his success, retired.

From the moment that Agatha had entered the convent she had abandoned herself to all the bitterness of of grief; and far from repenting of her sinful actions, for which it appeared but too probable she had been sent to that place, which was one of the most rigid order in Sicily, she continually lamented her deprivation of those enjoyments which

which had constituted the happiness of her life.

She often thought too with sensations which ill became the heart of one now devoted to a life of religious seclusion, of the animated countenance of the cavalier, his regret for her hapless state, his instant offer of assisting her, and the distress that apaeared to overwhelm him when he found it imposible to rescue her. A ray of hope beamed on her breast, when she saw him in the chapel, and served in some small degree to lighten the heavy burthen of despair which had began to oppress her almost beyond a possibility of endurance.

When she had, as already is mentioned, possessed herself of the paper, she thought each moment an age till she could retire to her chamber and peruse its contents. She was, however, obliged to wait till the nuns were dismissed by the abbess, when she perceived it to contain the following words.

"BEAUTIFUL SIGNORA,

"The Deity of love, and kind "fortune, have in some measure favor- "ed my attempts to preserve you from "the cruel fate that awaits you within "these walls, and to restore to an ad- "miring world a jewel so sweetly

"formed

"formed to adorn it. If you have a "wish to know how far I have succeed- "ed, be at midnight in the chapel, "where you will see your ever de- "voted

"FERDINANDO."

Agatha kissed the lines, and smiled- ed her real delight; she counted the tardy moments as they slowly past by; and when at length the appointed period arrived, she descended from the chamber, and entered the chapel.

The Signor Ferdinando was not there; and anxiously waiting his coming, she leaned against the skreen, leav-

ing her lamp at some distance on the steps of the altar. Soon, however, she heard the echoes of hasty paces, and a man, muffled up in a clock carrying a lamp approached the skreen. When he came near it, he let fall his garment, and Agatha beheld her expected friend.

"Lovely Signora," said he, "thus far have I penetrated into this gloomy abode of superstition and horror, so unfit a residence for you. But alas! no way can I find to enter the convent. This cruel skreen divides us. Could I force the iron gate, even at this moment you might escape. Perhaps you may find some means to open it."

"Alas!

"Alas! Signor," said Agatha, "I know of none; but fortune, which hitherto has attended you, may not desert us. I will, however, make every effort to procure my wished-for enlargment from this dreary place. My gratitude, Signor, to you is indeed great; your disinterested goodness must ever claim my warmest thanks."

"And does not the beautiful Agatha," said Ferdinando, "perceive that it is love the most ardent which impels me. From the first moment I saw you, I devoted myself to your service. Continually have I lamented your cruel destiny, and continually have I endeavoured to seek to alter it."

The

The countenance of Agatha, covered with blushes, shewed that the declaration of Ferdinando was not unpleasant to her ears. She raised her eyes on him—they met his enamoured gaze—they spoke more than the tongue could ever express—the fire of love was in them.

Ferdinando with rapturous sensations rivetted his eyes on her beauties. A silence ensued, but it was a silence which expressed the sentiments of Agatha, and the unspeakable sensations of Ferdinando, who at length interupted it by declarations of the tenderest attachment to that lovely female.

Thus

Thus passed away the now fleeting hours, and at length the Signor Ferdinando seeing the grey dawn peeping through the casements of the chapel, was oblige to depart; but not before he had imprinted on the white hand of Agatha, which she held out to him through the grating, a thousand kisses, and swore on it an eternal adoration.

Slowly they withdrew, often turning back to gaze on each other, for the passion that reigned in the breast of one existed with equal strength in the bosom of the other; but it was that passion which ceases to exist the moment it has attained its object.

As

As Agatha had much to perform, and the Signor Ferdinando had some affairs to arrange at Lingua Crossa, a city near the base of the fiery Etna, their next meeting was fixed for the seventh night from that period, and Agatha in the interim was busily engaged in ruminating on the means by which she might obtain the key of the gate, and so effect her deliverance from the convent.

The Demon, whose searching eyes penetrated the dark womb of futurity, and who had long looked on Agatha as his own, resolved to aid her in her present purpose; foreseeing that by it he should plunge her still farther

ther in guilt, and that she would commit an act, at which human nature recoils, but which to him was the height of happiness to glut his gaze with.

She had on the fourth night from that on which she had parted with Ferdinando retired to her couch rather earlier than usual; she felt little inclined to sleep, but lay looking at the moon which was gliding along the heavens, and threw her silver radianee into the chamber of Agatha.

As the tones of the clock proclaiming the midnight hour broke on the silence around, she felt a sudden drowsiness

siness seize her, and yeilding to its influence was soon enwrapped in a deep slumber.

At that moment the Demon took his station by the side of her couch; on his blasted form the beams of the regent of night refused to shine, and she retired to the welcome covert of a dark cloud.

The arch enemy of man by his powerful arts caused visionary scenes to appear to the wakeful imagination of Agatha, in order to prepare her for what was to follow.

He brought to her view the form

of

of Ferdinando, whose countenance, beaming with smiles of delight, and irradiated with the fire of love, appeared more captivating than ever. She thought he was sitting by her side breathing in her ear the delusive expressions which proceed from the ardour of the moment, but which to her misled ideas appeared to be the dictates of a heart truly devoted to her. As such she heard them, as such they gave her the greatest delight.

She thought that they were sitting in an arbor formed of various odoriferous flowers; the beams of the moon trembled on the gently agitated waters of a stream that rolled its transparent

waves

waves not far from the spot where they were; while a distant waterfall and the plaintive notes of the nightingale sweetly broke on the silence around.

The rays of the silver lamp of night found their way through the variegated foliage of the arbor, and gave sufficient light to enable her to see the interesting features of Ferdinando; whose gaze was fixed on her, whilst his arm fondly attempted to encircle her slender waist, but from which he was prevented by some invisible power.

Suddenly the form of a monk seemed

seemed to stand before them, his face was concealed by his cowl, in his hand he held a key, and Agatha thought she heard him speak these words.

" Lovers, I come to break the spell that prevents your happiness, this key will be the means of bringing you to each others arms, and of enjoying those delights which those who love like you can only be conscious of. "

Agatha hastily stretched forth her hand to receive the key, its coldness made her start, she awoke, and at that moment by the returning light of the moon beheld a form receding from her sight; and soon became sensible that

that part of her dream was realized, for in her hand was the key.

Terrified, she let it drop from her hand, and raised her head to see if there was any one in the chamber, but the beams of the moon enlightened every part, and nothing met her view that could alarm her.

Hardly expecting to see it, and conceiving that the strength of her imagination operating on her senses had made her think that she in reality had a key in her hand, when she awoke she looked amongst the cloaths and to her astonishment found it. It was a large key, of an uncommon construction,

struction, and similar to one she had seen hanging up in a corner of the parlor belonging to the Abbess.

The singular way in which it had been conveyed to her made her almost fearful of touching it. She again considered her dream; what, said she, if this key should open the grate of the skreen—yes, it must be so; it is the means of escape, which some kind deity has thus conveyed to me.

In her impatience to know the fact, she was on the point of getting up and descending to the chapel, but lay down again on reflecting that she had no light, and that the moon could not assist her,

as the chapel casements were on another side of the edifice.

She laid the key beside her, and long tried, but in vain, to compose her senses to sleep. Toward the morning, however, she closed her eyes, and when she awoke, the remembrance of the strange occurrences of the past night crowded to her recollection. Hastily she looked for the key, which she beheld in the same place as she had left it.

Agatha now arose, and having placed it in the corner of a deep recess which was in her chamber, she sat ruminating on Ferdinando, and enjoying the fond idea that, now she probably had it

in

in her power to leave the convent with him. She looked forward with anxiety to the next night, when she should know whether she had been feeding herself with delusive hopes, respecting her deliverance or not. And she also reflected, that on the third night, if Ferdinando recollected his promise, she should have the happiness of again seeing him, and perhaps of having her dream sweetly realized.

According to custom the Abbess after the morning service sent for Agatha and the other noviciates, and read to them a pious exhortation, in which was set forth the happiness of a con-

ventual life ; and the certainty of future bliss that awaited its votaries.

Agatha paid little attention to the words of the Abbess, her thoughts were intently fixed on Ferdinando, and her dream of the preceding night. She once raised her eyes to the place where she had observed the singularly constructed key to hang, but it was no longer there.

The supernatural means by which it had been conveyed to her, while it made her shudder with sensations of terror, yet afforded her real delight, since she conceived that some kind

power

power was interested in what she thought was her welfare.

The discourse of the Abbess was insupportably tedious, and when at length Agatha was dismissed, she retired to her chamber, where she could ruminate at leisure on the prospect of happiness that was now opening to her view.

Night, that shares with day the empire of the world, at length threw her shadowy veil over the face of nature; and Agatha, who had long watched from her casement the increasing gloom, arose, and taking the key and a lamp in her hand, softly

left her chamber, and descending the stairs at the extremity of the corridore, entered the passage that led to the chapel.

With an agitated pace she advanced toward the gate and tried the key in the lock, the bolt flew back, and Agatha trembled with excess of delight at beholding the gate open, and the only seeming impediment that had existed against her gaining her liberty removed.

Having carefully locked the gate she returned to her chamber, and placing the key in its secret repository retired to her couch, where she long

long lay awake enjoying the pleasing idea of speedy emancipation.

At length to the delighted view of Agatha, the sun sinking behind the western hills left to the pale nocturnal lamp her wonted empire over the silent face of creation, on the night when she expected Ferdinando. With majestic splendor the silvery orb attended by myriads of bright satellites rising from the dark waving summit of an extensive forest, threw over them her radiant beams, and tipped with silver the heads of the tall mountains. Not a cloud obscured the azure arch of Heaven from the wondering gaze of silent contemplation.

But no celestial meditations existed in the bosom of Agatha, there were only nurtured the worst of human passions; and her bosom panted not with the sensations of the wrapt enthasiast when beholding the sublime works of an incomprehensible Being, but with the fond expectation of leaving her present seclusion, and of sating the unruly tumult of sensual ideas that the captivating form of Ferdinando had raised in her distempered imagination.

The hour appointed for her meeting with that Signor was now proclaimed from the highest turret of the monastic pile, and as the sounds retreated on the bosom of the nocturnal

nal breeze, Agatha arose, and taking the key, descended to the chapel.

Punctual to his promise, Ferdinando in the tenderest language of love, which sweetly sounded in the pleased ears of Agatha, hailed her as she approached to the gate; but when he saw her hand, which trembling with the various emotions that agitated her bosom, long time essayed in vain to turn back the bolt of the lock, his sensation of expectation and astonishment, of hope and fear, kept him silent. At length the gate opened, and he held to his bosom the panting form of the lovely Agatha.

The most impressive language that ever the fervent lover poured forth to the sweet idol of his heart would be inadequate to describe the sensations of Agatha and Ferdinando, when in mutual embrace they beheld themselves free from the cruel restraint imposed on them by the grating. They were silent, but that silence how expressive! their eyes wandered over each other, they seemed to read in each others souls the sweet expressions which their agitated sensations rendered it in vain for them to utter.

But those sensations how unworthy to hold a place in minds endued with reason; how did they prove the degeneracy

neracy of human nature? and sink it almost to a level with the brute creation.

A smile of pleasure sat on the features of the Demon, who from his horrific abode piercing the gloomy condensing volumes of smoke which rose from the eternal flames of divine wrath, beheld the pair embracing each other in the chapel of Santa Catherina. The pollution of a place dedicated to the worship of Saints afforded him the greatest satisfaction, and for a while made him forgetful of his fallen state, since he beheld his empire extending around, and vice increasing in her dreadful sway over the hearts of mankind.

Let a veil be drawn over the actions of that night which proved how great is the influence of the passions over those minds who have once deviated from the paths of virtue. The chapel of Santa Catherina beheld the guilty pair wantoning in the fulfilment of their wishes till the grey dawn made their long untrimmed lamps almost useless.

They now saw their error in not leaving the convent when they met. It was now too late; in another hour Agatha's flight would be discovered; Ferdinando was therfore compelled to defer till the next night the liberation of the nun; and then hastily left the companion of his

his deeds of darkness ere the morning sun should reveal them to the world.

Agatha retired to her chamber; the powers of reflection weakened by the frequency of her guilty acts, prevented not the influence of sleep, on her weary eyes; and it was not until the bell had summoned the inhabitants of the convent to the chapel that the somniferious deity left her to proceed to another hemisphere, where other worlds awaited his welcome approach.

Borne on the tedious wings of time passed the lengthening hours of day, and when at length the pale luminary of night held her silent reign, attended

by myriads of scintillating orbs, Agatha hailed her approach as the harbinger of her emancipation, and her mind began to anticipate the first scenes of voluptuous dissipation that would await her when again restored to the world.

At the appointed time she entered the chapel. The beams of the moon streaming through the casements shone full on the statue of the Virgin; it attracted the notice of Agatha, and as she gazed on the lovely countenance, the remembrance of the deeds of the past night rushed full upon her mind.

It was then that pallid fear drove away the roses of pleasuse from her counte-

countenance. She trembled as she lightly paced the centre aisle of the chapel, for a consciousness of the guilt of her past conduct, of her dreadful profanation of the purposes to which that edifice was erected, made her feel sensations of remorse, though steeled as her breast had long been against the sting of conscience.

She went to the gate, and leaning against a column long waited for the coming of Ferdinando, anxiously listening for the welcome echo of his paces. But the gloomy silence remained undisturbed; and the long sounding hour of midnight arrived without bringing with it the expected Signor.

The

The breast of Agatha grew every moment more agitated; she unlocked the gate, and advanced to the portal of the chapel which communicated with the monastery. There she stood bending forward in the passage, and holding her lamp high up in order that its rays might penetrate further into the gloom, and shew her the wished-for form of Ferdinando when he should approach.

The clock of the monastery now struck one, and still Ferdinando came not; the breeze of morn made her tremble under its chilly influence. Sighing she left the portal and retraced her slow melancholy steps to the gate of the skreen,

while

while words of self-reproach proceeded from her pale lips.

"Fool that I was to yield to the impetuous dictates of passion; but for that I might have been now blessed with my liberty. Ferdinando has gained his object, and he has now deserted me. Was I to learn that enjoyment which increases the love of woman totally estranges it from the heart of man? Silly Agatha, thou at least hadst no occasion for further experience; thou hast then thyself only to blame. While the raging flames of unsated desire pervaded his frame, what would he not have dared to have gained my emancipation? But now he no longer thinks on me;

me; or if he does, a smile of exultation marks his countenance at my folly in believing his vows, and consequent acquiescence to his wishes.

Thus through the tedious night did Agatha repine at what was now too late to alter; and at length she beheld the grey dawning of morn, and the dark folds of night departing to hold their reign in other worlds. She then locked the gate, cast one more despairing look down the grand aisle, and sorrowfully departed to her chamber, which with increasing agony of mind she paced till warned to attend the matin service in the chapel.

When

When she entered her eyes were immediately directed to the skreen, but no Ferdinando was there. She opened not her mouth during the service, she was unconscious of what was passing about her; her hopes of escaping from a life so odious to her now began to decrease, and as that tranquillizer of the bosoms of the unhappy fled, despair and horror filled the dreary void.

The coming night she again visited the chapel; she stood listening to the melancholy tones of the clock as it proclaimed the departing hours; but no other sounds broke on the silence that reigned in undisturbed horror in the gloomy and extensive chapel of the monas-

monastery and convent of Santa Catherina. All hopes of Ferdinando's coming now entirely deserted her, and she formed the dangerous resolution of endeavouring to find out the way by which he had entered the monastery, determined to make her escape by it.

Entering the aisle she proceeded to the portals; which having cautiously opened, she lightly trod the marble pavement of the lofty corridore, almost afraid, yet urged to proceed by her new-born hopes of escape. She advanced nearly to the extremity of the passage, examining the several doors which were on each side of it, but did not dare to open them

them, lest they should belong to the chambers of the monks.

At the extremity of the corridore which opened into a large hall rose a magnificent flight of stairs which communicated with a large gallery that was raised round it. As she was going to enter the hall Agatha suddenly stopped, and then hastily retreated, for she plainly heard several footsteps in the gallery above, and a light flashed on the sides of the hall; terrified at this, and finding the paces increasing and the sounds of several voices above, she flew with dreadful aprehension of being discovered toward the chapel, and as she was proceeding down the aisle the grand bell of the

the convent began to toll. Agatha's trembling hands could hardly lock the gate, and scarcely had she entered her chamber when she heard the steps of the nuns, who, alarmed at the unusual tolling of the bell, were hastening to the chapel whither it warned them.

CHAP. IX.

WHEN the first beams of the morning shot over the eastern mountains the Marchese de Carlentini arose, and, attended by the steward of the Castello and two domestics, proceeded toward the South Angle Tower.

Crossing the grass-grown court-yard that led to that wing, the portals of the South Hall being thrown open, disclosed a struc-

a structure so spacious and gloomy tha the heart of Ricardo, already saddened with the anticipation of what would meet his view in the Tower, was doubly sensible of the silent horror that seemed to reign in these deserted walls.

The centre of the hall was of great width and height; the vaulted roof was supported by lofty columns that rose in majestic grandeur on each side; long casements, which formerly served to admit the cheering beams of the sun, were above the galleries, which were likewise supported by columns; beneath them were another range of casements, which once gave light to the lower, as those above did to the upper parts of the hall,

but

but now the ivy wound about the broken panes, and the diligent spider wove there his snareful web. The columns were adorned with spoils of the contested field, and the torn banners waved mournfully to the blast that rushing through the broken casements sighed along the galleries.

Ricardo paused as he passed through the hall to contemplate the ravages of the destructive hand of Time. Many of the rafters which supported the roof had fallen on the marble pavement, and some seemed just deserting their hold, and only awaiting the next blast to increase the ruins below.

The

The armour which had so greatly alarmed him on that memorable night when he first entered the hall was still lying in a heap at the foot of the column, and he directed his people to replace it in its former situation.

That done, he went on to the passage where Grimaldi had so successfully alarmed him. Arrived at the extremity, a winding stair-case met his view, which he descended, and found it led to a large corridore, of which nothing but the walls remained; with some difficulty he passed over the crumbling ruins of the roof, but no door or outlet met their search. Ricardo with the assistance of some fallen rafters raised himself sufficiently high

high to look out of a dismantled casement, and saw beneath him a court wild and grass-grown, and the well-known black rugged walls of the Angle Tower rearing aloft their threatening heads, its embattled turrets far o'erhanging the base, and were crowned with long rank weeds that mournfully rustled when agitated by the wind.

From its situation Ricardo became convinced that the corridore must have some communication with the Tower, and directing his people to clear away a heap of rubbish which had fallen against the end wall, after some time and trouble found a small door, which having opened, the party cautiously

passed along a narrow passage, for the bending rafters of the floor threatened to give way and precipitate them to the chambers below. They now gained a narrow flight of stone steps, and Ricardo shuddered to think that he was within the walls of the Tower where his mother's blood had been shed. A dreadful execration at the remembrance of Grimaldi's acts arose in his breast and had nearly escaped his lips, but he checked the rising tempest of his soul, for Grimaldi was now doubtless suffering for his guilty acts.

The steps were lighted by long narrow apertures which were made in the

wall, and enabled Ricardo and his party to find their way. At length they came to a door, which, from Grimaldi's description, must belong to the chamber where the hapless Theodora met her fate. Ricardo trembled, and when the steward had opened it, hardly dared to examine the dusky interior. The men likewise stopped, and an awful pause took place.

Ricardo at length looked forward, but the objects in the chamber were involved in obscurity; all the casements save one were closed, and that faintly admitted the beams of day.

One of the men slowly entering went

to the casement, which he opened, and tore down the ivy that had clung to the stone divisions. Ricardo now saw an old dirty couch, covered with damps and mildew, in one corner of the chamber; he looked on it with a stedfast tearful gaze, expecting to see the bones of his mother. Such a spectacle was, however, spared him; the couch contained them not; other parts of the chamber were examined, but the remains of Theodora were not to be found.

Ricardo was now lost in wonder. From the description which Grimaldi gave him in the papers of the prison of the Marchesa, it was perfectly evident

evident that the one he was now in must have been that where he gave vent to the vital current of her existence.

He then looked on the floor, but it was covered so thick with the accumulated dust of fifteen years that the boards could not be seen. On removing it, however, Ricardo clearly discovered the traces of blood on some of them, and the melancholy evidence, while it made him certain he was in the room where his mother was confined and murdered, increased his astonishment, for he was certain that Grimaldi had not consigned her remains to the tomb; and from the beha-

viour of the Marchese, when he solicited permission to examine the tower, it was also evident that he had not conccaled them. Indeed the keys that led to the Tower being always in the possession of Grimaldi, he could not have interred the remains of his wife without Grimaldi's knowledge ; he was therefore bewildered in a maze of conjectures which increased every moment.

In the idea, however, that there might be a similar chamber, Ricardo proceeded by a long passage to the opposite side, but he became convinced, on examining the different rooms, the one he

he first entered was that alluded to by Grimaldi.

He again narrowly examined every part of the chamber, and at length retired, perfectly convinced that the object of his search was not there.

In crossing the South Hall, having observed on one side two large folding portals, curiosity made him approach them, and having caused them to be opened, he beheld a chapel, whose spacious dimensions caused an involuntary exclamation of surprize to escape his lips.

It appeared evident to him that the southern parts of the Castello had been

erected many years before the north, and that this chapel contained the remains of the ancient founders of the extensive pile.

He lightly trod the long-drawn aisle while awful reflections sunk deep into his soul. The monuments of his ancestors rose thickly around him; the figures recumbent on the tombs engaged his attention, they were for the most part formed of brass, and grey marble; that which appeared to be the effigy of the long inurned body of the founder of the ancient pile was the representation of a knight, formed of black marble, resting on a magnificent tomb of the same materials in his coat armor; a

stone

stone slab supported by four emblematic figures served as a canopy to the tomb, and on it was laid the rusty remains of the armor worn by the knight.

Ricardo endeavoured to read the inscription, but time had defaced the letters, and his curiosity remained unsatisfied. He looked around him, but the other tombs were far inferior in magnificence, and only attracted his momentary gaze.

Ah! thought he, how vain is the pageantry that is displayed here, how humble is now your pride, the poorest menial occupies as much room as the

remains of him on whose nod he submissively attended; the form that once was clothed in that cumbrous armor is now a heap of dust, the leavings of the loathsome worm.

This train of reflections, however, did not long inhabit the mind of Ricardo, a mystery yet seemed to be connected with the Angle Tower which now appeared to be inexplicable, for only Grimaldi could explain it, and he was no more.

He left the chapel, and having examined all the apartments which communicated with the hall, ordered the portals to be closed, and hastened to re-

late

late to Louisa the event of his researches.

She was greatly astonished at the account, and found herself unable to say any thing that could serve to allay the astonishment and rouse from his meditations the Marchese de Carlentini.

Weeks and months now rolled on, and Ricardo began to emerge from his train of melancholy ideas respecting the unfortunate Theodora in the contemplation of an event which was the bar to his perfect felicity in his union with Louisa. In a few weeks she would become a mother to an infant who after his decease would have no means of existence, as the estate would then pass

into other hands; he was, however, determined not to mention this circumstance to Louisa till she was able to bear it without affecting her health, which now began to be very delicate.

Louisa, who little expected the impending blow which would strike at the root of her happiness, hailed with the greatst delight the moment that made her a mother; she kissed and bedewed with tears of joy the rosy cheeks of a lovely infant, the pledge of her tender affection for Ricardo, and the pen is not adequate to express her delight when she saw him embracing his boy, who greatly resembled them both in the interesting

teresting beauties which dwelt in his countenance.

But the happiness of Louisa lasted not long; two, months had elapsed, and Ricardo, trembling with anxiety for the result, began to prepare the mind of Louisa for what must take place.

He informed her of the state of his pecuniary affairs, and as no provision could be made sufficient for the young Ricardo to support the elevated rank to which he must attain on his decease, the church was the only place which held out her fostering arms for him, and slightly hinted that the sooner he was taken from them, the less would be their

their affliction, for every day their love for their dear offspring increased, and, in consequence, so would their affliction at parting with him.

Great was the grief of Louisa as she clasped the little infant to her maternal bosom, and looked at Ricardo with a countenance so full of melancholy, that, unable to bear the sight, he hastily left the apartment and wandered on the dark recesses of the neighbouring forest, and for the first time reflected with some asperity on the inconsiderate conduct of his father, who had by his dreadful propensity for gambling and dissipation deprived his son of the means of supporting his family.

He

He saw that it would be almost necessary, to prevent the increasing fondness of Louisa for her infant, to send him from the Castello, and accordingly when he returned to it he wrote to the abbot of whom mention has already been made, informing him of the birth of his son, and claiming the performance of his promise repecting him; he ordered a man to carry his letter the next morning to the monastery where the venerable father presided, and then endeavoured, with the joint efforts of the tender Signora Bononi, to comfort his afflicted Louisa, and prepare her for the approaching separation.

On the third day the messenger arrived

rived from the abbot with a packet for Ricardo, who having broke the seal, read the following lines:—

" My son, I have perused your letter,
" and with the assistance of the blessed
" Saints will perform my promise. I
" will take an active interest in your
" behalf, for I feel for your situation.
" Your child may be brought up in the
" village near the monastery, I will see
" that all due attention be paid to his
" tender years, and should mine be
" permitted to increase, he shall be in-
" structed by me and the holy fathers
" to the extent of our poor abilities.
" Farewell, my son; may the Saints
" take you and yours in their holy keep-
" ing.

" ing. The blessings of the church at-
" tend you."

The next morning the little Ricardo, attended by his nurse, left the Castello. Great was the misery of Louisa, but she was obliged to give way to imperious necessity, and also to endeavour to appear composeed, that she might not add to the distress of her fond husband.

The child when it arrived at the monastery was solemnly dedicated at the grand altar to the service of the church, and when that ceremony was performed, was sent to the village, where, under the auspices of the good abbot,

abbot, he was to remain till of proper age to enter the holy walls of the monastery, where he was to pass the future years of his existence.

In order that no future regret might disturb the happiness of his life, the Marchese requested of the abbot that the name of his son should be changed, and that he should remain in ignorance of the rank he was entitled to by his birth.

Time with his lenient hand in some degree softened the sorrows that had long reigned in the bosom of the Marchese and Louisa on account of their son, who now devoted to the service of the

the church, was entirely lost to them, when intelligence was received of the death of the Signor Valvano, and which was shortly after followed by the arrival of a messenger with his will, in which he had bequeathed a large portion of his immense wealth to Ricardo.

At first the news increased their grief, since what unhappiness might they not have prevented if they had not been so hasty in parting with their infant, but this was in some measure alleviated from the circumstance of Louisa's being likely to produce another pledge of her love for her lord, which now, in conseqence of Valvano's legacy, would remain with them.

The bequest of Valvano not only enabled

enabled the Marchese to redeem his estate, but also to make various alterations in the Castello, and take from it that ruinous appearance which rendered it an unfit residence for a nobleman of his rank.

In process of time the Marchesa was delivered of a daughter, which was named Angellina, in compliment to the Conte Angello, a distant relation of Ricardo's. Great was the joy both within and without the Castello, for the peasants partook of the happiness of their lord, whose kind conduct toward them was rewarded by their ardent prayers which they unceasingly offered up to Heaven in his favour,

favor and its blessings which they each moment called down on him.

The Count de Leoni on receiving the pleasing information of his friends increase of fortune, repaired to the Castello to congratulate him upon it, and happily passed the hours in the enjoyment and anticipation of future days and years of increasing comfort. One circumstance only clouded the bosom of Ricardo, and that was the mystery that hung over the fate of his mother. Nothing had occurred since his search that could tend to throw the smallest light on the dark transactions of the Padre Grimaldi. At times many hopes would arise in his bosom, but

but they were soon dissipated by the perusal of the papers which that monk had committed to his hands.

Louisa had now to endure the severe loss of an affectionate mother; for some time her health had been declining, and it was now evident to all that she was fast hastening to the period of her existence. She was prepared for it, and awaited the awful moment with a calm composure, in the pleasing hope that her blameless life would be rewarded with eternal happiness.

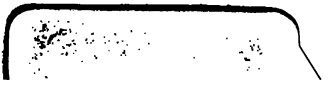
"Do not weep, my beloved Louisa," were her last words, "a few short years, and we shall meet again in Heaven. I leave

leave you in the highest state of human felicity, in the possession of innocence and virtue, and blessed with a husband who loves you. Should any adversities assail you, be not dismayed, resist them with a steady fortitude, and in every situation of life fail not to keep a firm reliance on Him who is all powerful. My soul longs for eternity; it is anxious to quit this earthly receptacle, to wing its rapid flight to the footstool of its Creator, and join in eternal hymns of praise with the celestial myriads who throng to offer up the grateful tribute of their adoration. Heavenly father," she continued, after a pause occasioned by the pains of dissolution, raised her languid eyes toward the heavens, "bless, I humbly beseech thee,

with the choicest of thy gifts a virtuous and contented mind, my Louisa and her Ricardo, and may we meet, when it shall please thee, in the bright regions of eternity."

Death now hasted on with rapid strides, and stopped the further current of her speech; she looked at Louisa, gently pressed her hand, and for ever left the world.

Over the griefs of Ricardo and Louisa we will draw a veil; both, indeed, deeply regretted her loss, but the sorrows of Louisa far exceeded those of Ricardo, for the tenderest and most affectionate of mothers was to her the lamented Signora Bononi.

END OF VOL. II.

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